

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6473

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Financial Institutions & Insurance, January 23, 2018

Title: An act relating to preventing fires in rental dwelling units.

Brief Description: Preventing fires in rental dwelling units.

Sponsors: Senators Liias and Wagoner.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Financial Institutions & Insurance: 1/23/18, 1/23/18 [DPS].

Brief Summary of First Substitute Bill

- Directs the state fire marshal to convene a task force of stakeholders to investigate ways to prevent fire deaths in rental dwellings and report findings and recommendations to the Legislature by December 1, 2019.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS & INSURANCE

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6473 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Mullet, Chair; Hasegawa, Vice Chair; Angel, Ranking Member; Fortunato, Hobbs and Kuderer.

Staff: Jeff Olsen (786-7428)

Background: The chief of the Washington State Patrol is responsible for appointing an officer known as the director of fire protection (Director), also known as the state fire marshal. The Director is required to promulgate rules and regulations regarding the design, manufacture, and installation of smoke detection devices in dwelling units. The Director is also authorized to enter premises and buildings for the purpose of inspecting and determining whether a fire hazard exists, and requiring conformance with minimum standards for fire prevention.

The state's Residential Landlord-Tenant Act regulates the relationship between a residential property owner (landlord) and the renter of the residential property (tenant). As part of the

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landlord's duties they are required to provide the tenant with a written notice that states: (1) the dwelling unit has a smoke detection device; (2) the tenant is responsible for maintaining the smoke detection device in working condition; and (3) there are penalties for the failure to maintain the smoke detection device in the dwelling unit.

Summary of Bill: The bill as referred to committee not considered.

Summary of Bill (First Substitute): The state fire marshal must investigate ways to prevent fire deaths in rental dwellings, educate landlords and tenants regarding their responsibilities, develop possible criminal penalties, evaluate insurance certification requirements or changes to the building code, and other possible programs or funding that would improve installation and maintenance of smoke detectors in rental apartments and single-family homes. The state fire marshal must form a task force of stakeholders including landlords of residential units, tenants, local governments, firefighters, representatives from home builders and construction trades, the insurance industry, and a nonprofit that provides free smoke detectors and installation. The state fire marshal must convene the initial meeting, and the task force shall choose its chair from among its membership. The task force shall update the appropriate committees of the Legislature by December 1, 2018, and report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the appropriate committees of the Legislature by December 1, 2019.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on First Substitute: PRO: Despite requirements for smoke detectors in rental units, there has unfortunately been a number of tragic deaths due to fires in rental properties. With the increase in housing costs, many rental properties and rooms are not properly equipped with fire detection. A non-profit was recently started to install free smoke detectors and over 1900 units have been installed. Almost 60 percent of fire deaths nationally are due to either no smoke detector present or non-working smoke detectors. The scope of the task force may need to be broader than just looking at the proper use of smoke detectors. The insurance industry has expertise in fire protection and fire loss and looks forward to working with the task force to assist in getting a solution to address the loss of property and life that is occurring due to fires.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Marko Liias, Prime Sponsor; Mel Sorensen, Property Casualty Insurers Association of America; Gerry Gibson, citizen; Robert Bradley, Washington State Association of Fire Marshals; Brad Tower, citizen; Jean Leonard, NAMIC, State Farm.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.